

“How Quota Design Affects the Substantive Representation of Women: Evidence from Burundi and Rwanda”

Quotas have become an increasingly popular tool to increase the representation of minorities in government. Gender quotas are the most common type employed by governments around the world, with over 100 countries passing some sort of gender quota or reserved seats for women in their national legislatures as of 2019. In addition, governments have also implemented ethnic quotas to accommodate their ethnic minority populations. Although gender and ethnic quotas have become more common instruments used by governments to increase the representation of minorities, it is actually quite rare that they exist at the same time ‘in tandem’ with each other. In this essay, I investigate whether or not having multiple quotas (or ‘tandem quotas’) affects the descriptive and substantive representation of minorities. I chose to examine this question by comparing the representation of women in Burundi versus in Rwanda, given that Burundi has both a gender and ethnic quota, while Rwanda only has a gender quota. Using them as comparative case-studies, I analyzed the proportion of women elected before and after the implementation of each country’s quotas, as well as the number of legislative successes women achieve while in office as evidence of their substantive representation. I find that the presence of multiple quotas renders different effects on the descriptive and substantive representation of women in each country. I conclude that a single-dimension gender quota is more effective in increasing the number of women in government, which therefore makes the substantive representation of women more likely than under a tandem quota.